

{ As prepared for delivery }

## **2002 Farm Bill Forum**

**Remarks by Thomas C. Dorr**

**Under Secretary for Rural Development**

**Bicentennial Center**

**Salina, Kansas**

**December 17, 2002**

### **Opening**

- **Good Morning**
- **Thank you Chuck for your kind introduction.**
- **President Bush made a terrific choice in selecting Chuck Banks to lead our Rural Development efforts here in Kansas.**
- **Chuck's leadership and strong economic and community development experience, both in the private sector and for Senator Roberts, are tremendous assets and are making a difference.**

- **Chuck understands that the key to making a positive and lasting impact on the future of rural Kansas is to bring to the table a wide variety of individuals with varying interests and talents.**
- **You need a team of individuals and organizations whose resources and experiences will help bring new economic and community development opportunities to your local communities. Looking around the room this morning, it seems there is such a team here in Kansas.**
- **Let me add that it also takes strong congressional support. Your Congressional delegation is working hard to make a difference for you and your families. Congressman Moran understands your needs and is working with Rural Development to improve economic and employment opportunities for you and to improve the overall quality of life in rural areas of Kansas.**

- **Another strong supporter is Congressman Jim Ryun, who, I understand recently toured several Rural Development projects.**
- **The leadership of Congressmen Moran and Ryun is making a difference in Kansas, and quite frankly, America as a whole. It is efforts like these that will help ensure economic resurgence in rural America.**
- **So, at the outset of this forum, let me make it quite clear, that if you have observations, suggestions, and especially questions regarding rural issues and rural development, I urge you to contact the Kansas State Rural Development team.**
- **Chuck and his fine staff can help sort through, get answers, and give you much guidance and direction on issues from economic development, to housing, health care, and the development and financing of other community facility and rural initiatives.**

## **Who am I?**

- **In the few moments I have this morning, I am going to give you a brief cross-cut of what we at USDA are responsible for accomplishing, especially as we implement the new 2002 Farm Bill, signed by the President this past May.**
- **President Bush has a number of major initiatives underway in this administration, which directly impact rural America, such as Energy, Housing, and Performance Measurement.....or what we in rural America simply call accountability.**
- **As Under Secretary for Rural Development I share the President's strong recognition of the need to address these and other critical rural issues...in large part because I have deep roots in rural America. For all but nine years of my life I have lived, worked and enjoyed the fruits of life on a farm in rural Northwest Iowa.**

- **The one thing I've known from the start of my transition from being a farmer and businessman to someone assigned to administer an agency within USDA was that Rural Development is well positioned to facilitate the delivery of needed services and programs to rural America.**
- **While Rural Development may be well positioned with a stable of traditional programs and very capable associates, I believe a renewal and clarity of vision might well be required to renew the energy and belief in ourselves and in all of rural America. By so doing it will enable us to refocus our outreach efforts. This new sensitivity and belief in ourselves – not Rural Development – but our belief in rural America will drive all of our efforts in rural development.**

- **But to be successful – let me make one observation,  
Folks ----- We must learn how to celebrate success in  
rural America ----- as we justly reflect on the traditions  
and values which rural Americans have so ably  
bestowed on this great land ----- we must likewise  
encourage those who step out and try new  
opportunities. We must learn how to celebrate success.**

### **Vision Introduction**

- **This morning I wish to share with you President  
Bush's vision for rural development throughout  
America.**
- **In addition to sharing with you the President's vision  
for Rural Development, I wish to touch on USDA's  
progress in implementing the 2002 Farm Bill. This will  
include Rural Development's portions of it particularly  
the value-added, renewable energy development, Rural  
Housing, and Distance Learning and Tele-Medicine  
programs.**

## **Vision**

- **Implementing the Bush Administration's vision for rural America means that at the outset we must accept the reality of changing economic conditions.**
- **Let me put this in perspective. There are approximately 3200 counties in the U.S. Approximately 80% of the land mass is considered rural and 75% of all the governing bodies are rural. At the completion of the 1980 census over 960 counties nation wide derived at least 20% or more of their gross income from production agriculture. The newly released data from the 2000 census indicates that only 262 counties retain that distinction.**
- **Local and regional economies are much less dependent on agriculture. Thus they now require new and innovative approaches to create the needed economic and employment opportunities.**
- **Let me reframe the challenge of rural economic development in this manner.**

- **There are approximately 58 – 60 million rural Americans. Of these only about 2 – 3 million directly benefit from Title I & Title II payments from the Farm Bill. The other 95% of Rural Americans are for whom we advocate at Rural Development. If I were to have said this 10 years ago, there may have been general denouncement.**
- **Yet this is the case.**
- **So what specifically is our vision?**
- **Simply put it is**
  - 1. To increase economic opportunity throughout rural America**
  - 2. To improve the quality of life for all rural Americans**
- **Although these two goals sound simple enough, as most of you who live in rural Kansas know, this is easier said than done.**



## **Outreach**

- **The question is how do we propose to do this?**
- **In order to be economically competitive and to enjoy a high quality of life, rural areas must enhance their ability to compete for resources and residents. That means rural residents must have better access to information and the infrastructure to support the systems required to address their economic and social needs.**
- **Government and other developmental programs delivered to rural America should be highly flexible and adaptive to the very unique and specific circumstances in each rural setting. These programs must take full advantage of partnering and leveraging efforts across institutions and at all levels of government.**

- **It is imperative that at all levels of government we address the unique needs of capital formation in order to improve the flow into rural areas.**
- **If we begin to succeed at these initiatives, many of which are already in play, then opportunities will move into these rural areas.**
- **The result will be an improvement in the quality of life for all the 60 + million Americans presently living in rural communities.....and.....the likelihood is that we may well attract new families to these areas.**
- **To help make this vision a reality we, all of us, will need to be more imaginative in our marketing strategies and the use of our human capital as well.**

- **As a result I have been and continue to ask all our Rural Development employees to seek out and develop opportunities, while simultaneously elevating them to everyone's attention. We can no longer wait for opportunities to come to us.**

### **President Bush's Priorities**

**President Bush and this Administration have been working over the past two years to address several key areas important for a safe and prosperous America:**

#### **1) Homeland Security**

- **When the President called for creation of the new department, he recognized the critical importance of agriculture to America's homeland security. This new agency will bring together federal resources, including USDA's border inspection and protection services, to ensure the safety and security of food, livestock and agricultural production.**

- **The creation of the Department of Homeland Security does not mean USDA's role in homeland security is reduced. We will be an active partner with the new department in helping ensure the safety of America's food and agricultural sector.**
- **Under President Bush's leadership, the federal government has mobilized like never before to protect the American people, putting new protections in place and enhancing old ones. The Department of Homeland Security will give us a much stronger line of defense against very real threats to our agriculture and homeland.**

## **2) Renewable Energy**

- **When President Bush unveiled his energy plan in May of 2001, he understood the important role agriculture can play in providing greater energy independence for our country.**
- **Renewable energy development was also a key provision within the 2002 Farm Bill and one that we working to implement.**
- **In fact, earlier this month we held a public meeting to receive implementation suggestions for section 9006 -- The Renewable Energy Systems and Energy Efficiency Improvements.**
- **This is an exciting time in rural America. It is a time when our country and our President are turning to our farmers, ranchers, and rural businesses for their knowledge and resources in order to help America become energy independent and more economically strong.**

- **As an example, in the last two years, Rural Development has financed 73 loans and grants in 25 states totaling \$45 million to fund biobased and bioenergy related businesses. This is a significant step in beginning to fulfill the objectives of President Bush's energy plan.**
- **Most critical --- is the fact that many of the renewable resources we expect to develop – will be from the farms and fields of Kansas and those of your neighboring states.**
- **Once again, rural Americans are the pioneers leading the way. America's strength comes from you and the spirit of ingenuity you embrace. If America is to become energy independent, the Heartland will play a crucial role.**

### **3) Homeownership**

- **One of the key and essential components to hastening the flow of capital is one of the oldest forms of building capital known to mankind—it is homeownership!**



- **An economically and socially strong rural America is central to President Bush's economic agenda. Homeownership is a key component in this effort. Not because it sounds good politically, but because he believes passionately in the strength of families—just as all of you do. And central to strong families—is a solid, safe and secure home. The kind of home all families wish to come home to.**

### **Farm Bill**

**President Bush's effort to stimulate our economy and create new jobs is supported by the efforts of Congress and the passage of the 2002 Farm Bill.**

- **The new bill is very complex in nature and our employees throughout the country are working to implement the provisions in a timely, efficient and effective manner.**
- **A good example of the outstanding effort to implement provisions quickly and efficiently is the quick review and selection of the 2002 Value Added Agricultural Product Market Development Grants.**



- **Keep in mind that the grant program was authorized in May and, by October, we were able to make the selection announcements that included seven grantees from Kansas. This is the kind of effective and efficient government President Bush wants. We are holding ourselves accountable.**
- **Overall, USDA has met the timetables and as a result, more than \$13 billion is flowing to our farm sector from all sources at USDA in this final quarter of the year.**

### **Distance Learning and Telemedicine**

- **Rural America has a critical role to play in the President's overall economic and energy agenda, and in the implementation of the 2002 Farm Bill.**
- **But to be successful, we must continue to expand access to technology infrastructure. Why is that important? Because it provides our rural citizens with greater opportunity to enhance their education, to improve local services, increase the competitive edge in the marketplace, and provide an overall higher quality of life.**
- **In October, Rural Development announced the Rural Utilities Service Distance Learning and Telemedicine grants to fund 71 recipients totaling more than \$27 million for education and medical service in 33 states.**

- **These grants will help bring rural communities access to better, faster and more modern health care, while students in rural areas will receive better equipment, learning tools, and access to courses that would otherwise be unavailable.**
- **These grants help invest in infrastructure projects that assist rural communities with communications and medical services and in general better access to information and knowledge.**

## **Conclusion**

- **In conclusion Rural Development is one of the core agencies affecting development in Rural America. We have the delivery mechanism and technology to make things happen.**
- **We have 850 offices across the nation staffed with outstanding personnel who are capable of innovation and problem solving.**

- **Our team is working to help improve the flow of capital, technology, strengthen infrastructure and increase opportunities of all types.**
- **The result of all this service is that we are trying to help provide a safe and abundant water supply; improving housing for rural residents; assist fire and emergency management services in securing essential equipment; and partnering with individuals to create or retain needed jobs for Kansas. These are just a few of the many initiatives and success stories of USDA Rural Development.**
- **Through Rural Development's housing programs, individuals are helped with buying, building, or renting homes. Rural Development's business and cooperative programs assist entrepreneurs in the creation of jobs by becoming a tool for funding the growth and creation of rural businesses and cooperatives.**

- **Other Rural Development programs help rural communities build or improve schools, health clinics, fire stations, and other community facilities. Rural Development also has programs that help rural communities with infrastructure projects; building or extending utilities such as water, electricity and telecommunications.**
- **Together we will all continue to play a significant role in creating new opportunities in Rural America.**
- **Thank you for your time.**